

medieval to modern times from England and America. There are letters from Jeb Stuart and Abigail Adams, documents dealing with Gilbert and Sullivan and FDR. These essays will delight and beguile the pedantic and precise, the lover of the factual and detailed. (ECK)

Going Back to Charleston

Intellectual Life in Antebellum Charleston, edited by Michael O'Brien and David Moltke-Hansen, Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press; \$45.00.

The United States were once precisely that, a union of unique and independent states—each making its own literary and intellectual contribution to the national experience. Of these states, none was so peculiar as South Carolina, and for much of its intellectual history, South Carolina was Charleston. In the generation before The War, Charleston was in the process of becoming something like a regional literary capital presided over by novelist William Gilmore Simms and the statesman and essayist Hugh Legaré, although the most enduring productions may be a few poems of Henry Timrod.

Despite the historical significance of the subject, *Intellectual Life in Antebellum Charleston* represents the first serious attempt to put the Charleston literary scene in focus. This well-conceived and carefully edited volume includes essays on Simms and Legaré (although not Timrod), such 18th-century notables as David Ramsay and Charles Pinckney, as well as lesser figures like Christopher Memminger and the famous (in Charleston) wit, Judge Petigru. There are also general discussions of classicism in Charleston and the town-versus-country theme in women's novels. The volume is worth having if only for a few very solid essays: Michael O'Brien's forceful and lively treatment of Legaré, Richard Lounsbury's analysis of "Charlestonian intellectuals and their classics," and David Moltke-Hansen's lucid survey that serves as an introduction.

A few of the contributions, unfortunately, exhibit the signs of narrow specialization. Steven Stowe manages to convey the impression that the ancient conflict between town and country mice was invented in Charleston. (On this point he might have consulted

either Lounsbury or Theodore Rosen-garten, whose thorough discussion of "The Southern Agriculturalist" includes the observation, "The country's distrust of the city is a very old tradition.") He also engages in the deplorable "what if" generalizations so common among feminist social historians:

But the bonds of feeling and expression between women and men . . . were stretched thinner and more precariously across a deep misgiving about social life. It was a misgiving about whether the separate realms of the sexes, in dividing up social reality, splintered social reality.

As ever, slovenly syntax and mixed metaphor betray the confused mind. Fortunately, few of the contributors to this significant symposium are subject to fits of ideological posturing. For the most part, they are sound scholars who succeed in combining original research with the broader approach of intellectual history. If they have a fault, it is perhaps this: most of them (with the exception of Lacy Ford and Moltke-Hansen) seem to be writing from *outside* the Southern tradition rather than within it.

Alas for the South. . . . No one interested in American intellectual history can afford to neglect Charleston's contribution now that so good a start has been made at exploring this unknown territory. (TF)

Journalists and Other Turncoats

by John Romjue

Conversations With the Enemy: The Story of PFC Robert Garwood by Winston Groom and Duncan Spencer, New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons.

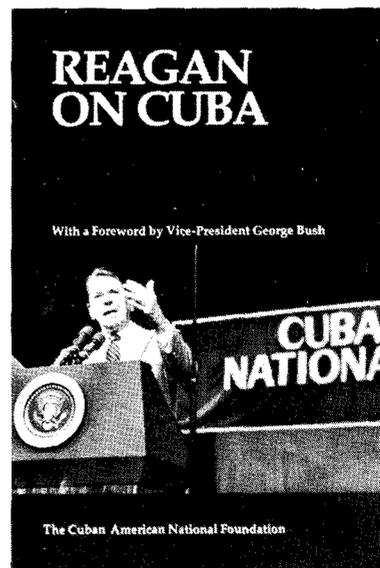
America's journalists enjoyed their finest hour during Vietnam—indulging in reporting that overwhelmed all objective presentation of American military action. A recent book about Robert Garwood by two former reporters for the *Washington Star* suggests that our newspapermen are not done yet.

Marine Private First Class Robert Garwood, captured by the Vietcong in 1963 and released by his North Vietnamese masters in 1979, was the only American prisoner of war brought to trial by the Department of Defense for collaboration with the enemy. In 1981

a military court at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, found Garwood guilty of collaboration and physical maltreatment of an American prisoner, and dismissed him from the service.

During the trial, seven former Vietnam POW's who had known Garwood in the camps took the stand. All testified for the prosecution, none for Garwood. Their judgment of the "white Cong" they had encountered in the jungle was unanimous: Garwood had "crossed over." He lived separately from them in the compounds, ate with the camp cooks, and enjoyed a general freedom of movement around the camps. Garwood was friendly and familiar in dealings with his captors, and because of his acquired fluency in Vietnamese he served as the enemy's spokesman during political reeducation classes.

Garwood's recent biographers develop Garwood's personal story in the sympathetic "interior mode" as if privy to tape recording of his private thoughts for the past 16 years. From the extensive picture they present of Garwood's captivity in the jungle camp—interwoven with detail of his depressing pre-enlistment family life and postrelease adversities (including a child molesta-



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tion charge dismissed for insufficient evidence)—the reader is to gather that Garwood was, above all things, a “survivor,” a supreme achievement. The treatment of Garwood’s motives—“nature or nurture”—is even more dubious. With sneers at the Marine Corps and Middle America, the authors depict their subject as the hapless product of a rootless America and of an absurd war the volunteer Marine never wanted to fight, the victim of a Military Code of Conduct that has become irrelevant.

What emerges from the elaborate rationalization of Garwood’s collaboration, however, is that it was Garwood himself who created his protracted ordeal. From the moment he decided that survival meant more than every other loyalty, he became his masters’ malleable tool. Garwood repaired his captors’ radios, tested their bullhorns, cleaned and carried their weapons, signed without protest their propaganda documents. Indeed, he emerges as considerably more collaborative in the testimony of his camp mates, which his biographers report, than he appears to be in the inner tape recording that Spencer and Groom have labored so hard to reproduce. The reporters do not resolve—or even acknowledge—this serious internal contradiction in their book.

The impact of tendentious biography may be considerable in the contemporary moral dimness. Vietnam, in its unexamined tangle of myth, fact, and fiction, is the uncontested central event in modern American history for an unmoored and suggestible generation—not least for that circle of dewy young didacts in the Congress who rise to lecture and scold the pariah nation like fledgling Puritan divines. Groom and Spencer’s book adds another small text to the pulpit of Dodd, Downey, Markey, and Co.

John Romjue is a historian with the U.S. Army.

Telling Stories Out of School

by Brian Murray

P.E.N. New Fiction I, edited by Peter Ackroyd, New York: Quartet; \$14.95.

It was P.G. Wodehouse, I think, who once told an anxious would-be writer of fiction that literary success was the result of careful adherence to a few very

simple rules. Find a desk, Wodehouse suggested, and stock its drawers with sharp pencils and plenty of paper. Pull up a chair. Then, “Put your bum on the chair. And keep it there.”

Of course, would-be writers—particularly the less gifted ones—are always looking for a less sweaty path to wealth and celebrity. The shelves of our public libraries are full of handbooks that purport to reveal—in avuncular tones—the central tricks of the writer’s trade. Perhaps the most amusing of these is James N. Young’s *101 Plots—Used and Abused*. Young worked as a fiction editor at a time when short stories were accorded prime space in such general-interest periodicals as *The Saturday Evening Post* and *Collier’s*. Like any editor, Young routinely shoveled his way through great stacks of unsolicited material; in due course he became something of a connoisseur of the hackneyed plot.

Among the old stories Young embalmed in *101 Plots* is the one about the two bandits who together pull off a great heist, but who both—at a celebratory dinner in a secluded spot—“die of poisoning, each having poisoned the other.” Here too is the account of the puny fellow named Percy who impresses a young woman with his strength and valor until his alarm clock sounds and he discovers that, alas, it was all “only a dream.” “Be careful not to trick the reader too much,” Young notes. For “readers get their dander up when a writer takes unfair advantage of them.”

101 Plots first appeared in the mid-40’s. These days, one rarely comes across the sort of stale and corny tales that Young warned against. Many of today’s published stories eschew story line in favor of the conveyance of voice, character, and atmosphere; many of these predictably resemble in structure and theme the sort of midnight jottings that one might expect to find in the private journal of a lonely teaching assistant who has spent the day reading Kafka and scribbling “awk” and “frag” on too many unintentionally Kafkaesque freshman themes.

Such “serious” fiction can then be as hackneyed as anything that poor Young had to pore over. Indeed, perhaps the time has come for an updated version of *101 Plots*—a version titled, say, *It’s Been Done* and aimed at the many creative-writing majors who have read the likes of Anne Beattie and Raymond Carver and understandably said to themselves: “Geez, if they can do it, anybody can.” This volume would urge the neophyte authors not to portray yet another trapped housewife or frustrated

academic; to steer clear of images of dead dogs in suburban driveways and dying insects dragging themselves across bedroom floors; not to pack too many short, present-tense paragraphs with brand names and the titles of pop songs; to go ahead and employ adjectives and adverbs not found in the pages of *TV Guide*.

The 29 stories that Peter Ackroyd collected in *P.E.N. New Fiction I* are not the products of American grad students of creative writing. They were written for a short-story contest sponsored by the English branch of P.E.N., the international writers’ society. Most of these pieces take place in British and Irish settings and are largely free of the fatigued tone and monochromatism that one finds in the Carver-like minimalist efforts that continue to turn up in American “little” magazines and literary quarterlies. Tract houses, fast-food joints, pick-up trucks, and vaguely rendered characters named Chick, Webb, and Jewel are all refreshingly absent.

Unfortunately, only about five of these stories achieve real distinction. These are Desmond Hogan’s “Ties,” Thomas McCarthy’s “Mammy’s Boy,” Clare Boylan’s “Villa Marta,” Ronald Hayman’s “Urchins,” and Meira Chand’s “The Gift of Sunday.” But these pieces are vivid and smooth and memorable enough to make *P.E.N. New Fiction I* a worthwhile choice for library patrons who continue to find that—in airplanes, laundromats, and swimming pools—a fine short story can make a splendid companion.

Brian Murray is professor of English at Youngstown State University.

The Mafioso

by Christopher Muldor

Organized Crime, 2nd edition, by Howard Abadinsky, Chicago: Nelson-Hall.

According to some theorists, most of America’s woes began with the arrival of big government in 1932. Before that time, so the story goes, liberty was the rule, the work ethic was alive and well, God was in the classroom, and all was well with the world. As with all ideologies, this one presents an incomplete picture of reality. Organized crime, a major presence in American life well before 1932, was not exactly a showpiece of free-market capitalism.

In *Organized Crime*, Howard Abadinsky has written a lucid and compre-